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The Foreman—His Training and Education

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THE foreman has of late become a conspicuous target at discussions relating to industrial problems, particularly on labor relations. His was the keynote problem of at least one national convention. Unless extreme caution is followed, our experiments on the foreman will end as fruitlessly as many other labor experiments. The problem of education and training in this field as in others must be met with an understanding of human nature and a consideration of fundamental principles. Already the remedies suggested are many, and testimonials of "wonderful results" are easy to secure. The industrial "quack" learned early that industrial education is a profitable field because the results do not lend themselves to accurate measurement. Few industrial managers have made a study of the educative process, thus they have no basis for judging the extravagant claims of the pseudo-educator.

This note of warning is not intended to minimize the problem but rather to emphasize the necessity of slow and sound procedure. The old adage might well read, "There is no royal road to foreman training." One manager says, "We spent six months analyzing and studying the problem, and three months preparing the foremen to be receptive to our training course. It paid. We found this problem as subject to analysis as any of our other production problems."

Fortunately, the principles of education and best methods of training are known. How can they be adapted to the education and training of foremen? In order to go into the subject

more thoroughly the writer is limiting this article to a treatment of the problem as it relates to the foreman in service. The same principles will apply largely to the training of apprentice foremen.

This principle is established: foremen cannot be formally trained without their own consent. More than that, they must be actively interested in their own development. This cannot be done by calling them together, giving them a fine banquet, and arousing their enthusiasm by the evangelical methods of the religious "exhorter." They will be converted to the cause temporarily, but the back-sliding will be under way before the next morning's starting whistle blows.

Foremen will not be interested in any scheme of education unless they feel a need for it. Most of them do not feel this need. They are not aware of the deep problems connected with their work, nor should they be blamed for this condition of affairs. They are as much "sinned against as sinning." What is there in the average foreman's job that promotes deep thought? Is he not subject to that host of mind paralyzing influences which invariably accompany routine duties, system and quantity production? One foreman answered the question by misquoting the following: "Ours not to reason why, ours but to do or die." Foremen have not had the mental stimulation that comes of a man's "making his own job." Today the feeling of the old-time foreman who realized deeply his responsibility for all that went on in his department is rare. Many feel them-

selves to be the pawns of the experts, the executive tools of the brains in the "front-office." Their work is cut out for them by the superintendent. It is planned for them by the production engineers. "Why should I think," asks Bill Jones, a foreman, "when what I am to do is being worked out on paper by the boys with the white collars and the college education?" "They don't have to follow my advice, but they might ask for it once in a while just to make me feel good," says another. Should we wonder at the charges which management brings against the foreman of "lack of coöperation," "unappreciativeness" and "policies that never get down to the workers." One foreman has put it this way, "I would be d— glad to coöperate with the labor manager if he would only act as if he felt that I also am a labor manager—in my department. He spends more time downtown with those employment managers from the other plants than he does with us labor fellows here in this organization. Why don't he talk over with us what he reads; what they talk about; what they say at those conventions which he attends. All we hear from him are calls over the 'phone as to why this man was fired or that one quit. I'd like d— well to work with him but he won't let me." That statement does not stand out alone. It is typical of the opportunities for foreman training that are slipping by every day. How easily might a desire for education be created in that foreman. In fact the desire is there—latent—unrecognized.

NECESSITY FOR SOUND MANAGERIAL POLICIES

An industry that is not organized on sound managerial policies cannot afford to introduce formal foreman training. Training presupposes certain standards of perfection to be at-

tained. Unless standards of policy, system and methods have been well worked out there is no goal for foremanship. Education and training must have a goal. This is true of any shop or system of industrial education. Unless the standards set up by the management rest on sound principles, the foremen will find the goal illusory. Let us be frank. Can we afford to have our foremen think about our policies, analyze our systems, criticize our methods? Any other system of foreman training except that one which is based on things as they are in the shop, today, will be found wanting—by the foremen. From what "is" the foreman will think soon of what "might be" or "ought to be." Will the management be willing to "go all the way" with the foremen if they should become educated and get a vision of a better day in industry? There will be destructive criticism at first; that is to be expected. However, it is in the turning of this destructive viewpoint into constructive channels that the process of education functions. The foremen will view the classes as an opportunity to start making things right in the shop. If the management has the confidence of its foremen such educational classes may be the one common ground for all to start on, to work out right policies and methods together. A management whose foremen are disloyal has no basis whatever for starting foreman training. Disloyalty is a mental barrier that will resist any and all attempts at formal education. In such a case the first step would be the regaining of lost confidences and the mending of broken trusts.

No textbooks, or other commonly used tools of education, are necessary in order to start foreman training. A real interest in the problems of industry by some member of the managerial force is the first requirement. An hon-

est desire to share that interest with some foreman is the second. Talk with this foreman about the things that are going on in the managerial world. Consult with him about, but never settle some grave production problem. Give him plenty of food for thought. Loan him a book to "look over" and report to you as to the advisability of recommending it to others. Take him to a meeting of the local engineering body or production managers association, provided the programs can be grasped by him. If your educational seed has fallen on fertile ground and you have nurtured it well, this foreman will soon be a center of educational propaganda among the other foremen. Deep interest is contagious.

Someone, preferably a foreman, should take the step to crystallize this increasing group interest into a formal request to the management for more favorable opportunities to work out their problems together. At this point the management will be tempted to take from the foremen the control of the future foremen's school. This should not be done. Let the foremen appoint a committee to work out, with the management, the ways and means of the school. The responsibility of this committee should never cease to be to the foremen first and to the management last. The management will, in the end, have to do most of the administrative work connected with the school, but they should never reach the point where they assume all responsibility.

Out of the foremen's schools which have been conducted in different parts of the country there is growing a definite body of knowledge on this problem. The writer has attempted in the following brief outline to embody the best practices which have come to his attention through corre-

spondence and discussions with teachers, administrators and representatives of industries where the work is being conducted. He has personally observed the success of most of the methods presented. These methods are all more or less flexible and local conditions must govern their application.

ORGANIZATION OF THE SCHOOL

The classes should have enrolled in them men of equal rank. Where foremen and their assistants are in the same classes, discussion is repressed. Both subordinates and superiors usually hesitate to reveal their true opinions on a problem in each other's presence. This is far from being an ideal situation, but it is one which exists in most industries. Where mutual confidence prevails, mixed classes will succeed.

There should not be less than eight nor more than fifteen men in a class. It is hard to keep up interest if the group is too small. The discussion must always be kept alive. If there are more than fifteen the discussion becomes unwieldy. Each member does not get sufficient opportunity to take part.

Enrollment should not be made compulsory by the management. If the foremen themselves cannot succeed in persuading an unwilling fellow-foreman, compulsion by the management will not make him learn even if he is coerced into attending.

Attendance on the part of those enrolled should be compulsory. Once a man has expressed a desire to go through with a certain program undertaken by a group, he is under obligations to the group to "see the thing through." In order to succeed, an educational program must have the support of all until the end is accomplished. The absentee has a depressing affect upon a class. His absence

unconsciously suggests to the class the questionable value of the work which they are doing. Regular attendance should be one of the conditions of enrollment.

As to the time of the meetings of such classes, opinion and practice differ. There is almost unanimous agreement that they should be held on company time and as early in the work day as possible. If the educational work is considered important it should hold such a position in the foreman's daily schedule. An hour or two after the work day has commenced the foreman should have sufficiently adjusted the day's problems and so arranged his duties as to enable him to attend a nine or ten o'clock class. His mind is still fresh and in a condition to tackle the problems of the class discussion. One of the advantages of holding classes during working hours is that it forces the foreman to so organize his department that it will function efficiently during his absence. Foremen soon come to take a pride in a self-running, self-adjusting department. It also gives the assistant foreman an opportunity to grow through the assumption of responsibilities.

As to frequency of meetings, one hour twice a week is better than two hours once a week. It is better to cut a discussion off at the end of an hour while it is still hot than to allow it to drag out until it cools. Two hours is too long to attempt to hold the attention of foremen. Meetings held more often than twice a week make the training too intensive. There must be time between meetings for the ideas to be mulled over and considered. Two weeks between meetings gives too great an opportunity for interest to slump.

Classes should start and stop on schedule. While apparently a minor rule, its violations have subtle and far reaching effects.

All the physical equipment that is necessary for this work is a quiet, well lighted and well ventilated room; a table large enough for everyone to get their feet under at the same time; substantial, comfortable (but not easy) chairs and a blackboard.

The first meeting should be devoted to a mutual working out of a few simple rules to guide the conduct of the meetings, such as: "all men take part in every discussion," "only one man talk at a time," "treat each problem discussed as impersonally as possible," "speak briefly and to the point," "attend every meeting and always be on time." Some member of the group should be appointed to assume the responsibility of reminding the members of the meetings at least one hour before the time scheduled. This increases attendance and decreases tardiness.

COURSE OF STUDY

The selection of the course of study is dependent upon the aims to be attained. The goal of training is different from that of education. Training implies that a foreman should receive definite information and form definite habits of action in order to function efficiently. Education attempts to develop his latent abilities. The former is more narrow in its scope and easier to attain than the latter. Probably each are equally important. Whether one or the other, or a combination of both is to be the aim of the school, must be decided first. It is the personal opinion of the writer that education must precede training. While a combination of both aims would be ideal, it presents a problem too difficult for the average instructor.

A very successful course of study was worked out by the foremen of a certain industry. Each foreman presented a long list of his own problems,

those which came up almost daily in his department. In all, there were about seventy-five different problems presented. These were classified under different subject headings by a committee of the foremen under the leadership of the instructor. After such classifications it was possible to arrange a schedule for discussions lasting over several months. This plan possessed several ideal features. The foremen did most of the work themselves. None could deny its practicability. Any problem could be remedied either in the light of necessary training or education, depending upon which one was needed. If the problem concerned cost records, the instructor reached for the telephone and called the cost accountant to the class room immediately to straighten out any misunderstanding. If the problem needed tact for its solution, there was always one tactful foreman or more present to reveal their method of handling the problem successfully.

Most of the courses for foremen sold commercially are good, provided they meet the needs of a particular plant, can be readily grasped by the minds of the foremen in the plant and can be presented successfully through the facilities which that plant can provide. No course of study can be lifted bodily from one industry and set down unchanged in another with any measure of success. The purchased or borrowed courses and the other factors of foreman training must each be so modified that they form an educational project in line with the aims to be attained.

THE INSTRUCTOR

The securing of a real instructor is the most difficult problem of foreman training. A man who has worked up an elaborate course in foreman training may fail as an instructor because

he lacks the qualities of a teacher. The teacher secured from the local public school system or some private educational institution may be unable to succeed with foremen. There are instances where foremen, without any teacher-training whatever, have made a phenomenal success with a class of fellow-foremen. They were natural teachers. A works manager, in a middle western industry, took over the instruction of his foremen after a professional teacher had failed on the job; he succeeded. His case is exceptional. The average industrial technician or executive lacks most of the qualities necessary in a teacher. Real teachers are rare. It will pay to search until one is found. A lack of knowledge of production problems need not necessarily disqualify one who is otherwise a real teacher. Knowledge of production can be easily acquired. Love and understanding of one's fellowmen, infinite patience, ability to inspire and a positive personality are qualities not easily acquired. It is hardly necessary to state that this teacher should possess a natural sympathy for the foreman and his troubles; that foremen should feel at ease in his presence and that they respect him highly.

INSTRUCTION METHODS

The best results have been secured by using the discussion method of instruction. This method develops the foreman by getting him to take part in a discussion. The closer the discussion comes to the foreman's interests, the greater the development. It is the instructor's business to so word a problem or ask a question that it will produce the greatest amount of thought and discussion. By skillfully directing the discussion, certain pre-determined conclusions or principles of foremanship may result.

One of the tests of the success of this method is whether the foremen arrive at a successful solution of the problem themselves or whether the instructor, becoming impatient, settles it for them. If the latter, great educational benefit has been lost. The greatest mistake which instructors of foremen make is to do the thinking for the men. There are times when lectures are necessary but the amount of self-development derived by the foremen usually varies inversely as the amount of talking or preaching done by the instructor. The instructor should appreciate that a man who has been a foreman from five to thirty years has performed at least some successful acts in handling men and that it is his duty as instructor to get this man to talk, to lay bare his experiences for the benefit of the other fellow or the other fellow's criticism. It is the instructor's duty to lead the men into making constructive rather than destructive criticism of existing policies, methods or conditions. If this one aim is accomplished, the course will have repaid all the efforts expended on it.

On the other hand, there are certain phases of a foreman's work which can be treated best by means of the lecture

or demonstration. Discussion would reveal the value to industry of accurate cost analysis; that is education. Discussion by foremen of the detailed application of a cost system would result in utter confusion of ideas. A lecture on cost systems with detailed explanation of the foreman's duties regarding it accompanied by enough practical demonstration to fix its workings in the foreman's mind would be training. There are technicalities in each industry which are conceded to be uncontroversial as far as the foremen are concerned. It is highly desirable that they know about them. Here the lecture method would bring the best results.

New industrial movements such as foremen training have a tendency to diverge from their goal. As we tinker with and fashion the parts which make up the means to the end we become absorbed in the technique. The development of the foreman is far more important than any course of study or method of training. The spirit of education must live. The foremen must carry it from the class room to the shop. It is the spirit of human development, so necessary to true industrial democracy.